

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2129

S E C R E T PRETORIA 4753

NODIS CHEROKEE

FROM LOW

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PDEV, PINT, RH

SUBJECT: RHODESIA: COMMENTS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION

1. I AM, OF COURSE, UNAWARE OF ANY INPUT WHICH YOU ARE MAKING INTO THE PRESENT FAST-MOVING SITUATION, BUT I AM CONCERNED THAT THE LATTER MAY BE LEADING US INTO A POSITION IN WHICH OUR ATTEMPT AT MEDIATION WILL BE DAMAGED AND WE COULD BE EXPOSED TO SEVERE CRITICISM.

2. WHILE, I BELIEVE, WE HAVE TO LET THE PARTICIPANTS PLAY OUT THEIR CURRENT ENTERPRISE, I AM NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT IT WILL LEAD TO A POSITIVE RESULT. SMITH AND NKOMO ARE BOTH PLAYING GAMES. SMITH APPARENTLY HAS TOLD NEITHER NKOMO NOR HIS COLLEAGUES, GAYLARD AND ROBINSON THAT HE HAS CONFIDED WHAT HE IS ENGAGED IN TO SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA; AND NKOMO HAS TOLD NEITHER MUGABE NOR THE OTHER FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS OF WHAT HE IS INVOLVED IN. PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT IT WHO ARE NOT SYMPATHETIC TO WHAT IS GOING ON AND MORE WILL LEARN. (I UNDERSTAND THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE WIND OF THE MEETING.) FURTHER MEETINGS WILL BE HELD WHICH WILL INCREASE THE EXPOSURE. THAT THIS MATTER CAN BE HELD VERY LONG SEEMS UNLIKELY.

3. WHATEVER OUR ACTUAL INVOLVEMENT, GRAHAMS AND MY LOW-KEY

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PRESENCE IN SALISBURY (AND LUSAKA) DURING THIS PERIOD WILL CONVINCE MOST OBSERVERS WHEN THE EVENTS BECOME KNOWN THAT THE UK AND US ARE ENGINEERING WHAT IS GOING ON. THE REACTION DOMESTICALLY AND IN RHODESIA COULD BE STRONGLY NEGATIVE.

4. OWEN'S OPEN ESPousAL TO SITHOLE, AND NKOMO OF THE OPTION CREATING A CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNMENT COUNCIL SEPARATE FROM THE

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER AND SUGGESTION THAT IT SHOULD BE NKOMO PROVIDES APPARENT EVIDENCE OF OUR INVOLVEMENT WHICH CAN MAKE MATTERS WORSE - AND CONTRIBUTES LITTLE TOWARDS RESOLVING THE PROBLEM. SITHOLE IS A NOTORIOUS LEAKER AND QUITE UNTRUSTWORTHY. IF AND WHEN IT SUITS HIS PURPOSE, HE WILL TELL THE WORLD THAT WE ARE TRYING TO IMPOSE NKOMO. I AM UNAWARE OF YOUR REACTION TO MY PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WE SHOULD SUGGEST TO OWEN THAT HE LIMIT HIMSELF TO DESCRIBING THE OPTION AND STOP SHORT OF ESPousing IT OR PUSHING NKOMO.

5. I BELIEVE WE SHOULD DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO KEEP THE TRACKS SEPARATE AND CONFINE OUR OWN INVOLVEMENT TO AN ALL-PARTIES CONFERENCE, AND IT'S SUBSTANCE. THAT MAY MEAN AT THIS POINT CONSIDERING PULLING JOHNNY AND ME BACK UNTIL THEY HAVE RUN THROUGH THE PRESENT CAPER.

6. IF IT BLOWS, OUR EFFORT TO BRING THE PARTIES TOGETHER WILL BE SET BACK AS EVERYONE PUBLICLY RECONFIRMS HIS COMMITMENT TO HIS EARLIER ALLIANCE. IF IT DOESN'T, WE PROBABLY STILL HAVE SOME DISTANCE TO COVER BEFORE A MEETING CAN BE ARRANGED. NOT ONLY WILL SMITH AND NKOMO NEED MORE TIME BUT THE LATTER WILL PROBABLY INSIST THAT MUGABE BE BROUGHT IN; SMITH WILL HAVE TO CONVINCE MUZOREWA AND SITHOLE TO AGREE TO ATTEND THE MEETING; AND WE WILL HAVE TO FIND A SUITABLE LOCATION.

7. IT SEEMS TO ME IT WOULD BE A SHAME TO ALLOW OUR INITIATIVE TO SECRET

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BOG DOWN AT THIS POINT. YET IF WE ARE NOT ABLE TO TRANSLATE INTO ACTION THE PRESENT BROAD POPULAR SUPPORT FOR IT AND APPARENT WILLINGNESS OF SMITH, NKOMO AND MUGABE TO ATTEND, WE MAY MISS THE OPPORTUNITY. IN THAT CASE, WE ARE LIKELY TO HAVE TO SIT BACK AND WATCH AS THE SALISBURY GROUP PROCEEDS WITH FURTHER STEPS WHICH WILL MAKE ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN THE PARTIES IMPOSSIBLE -- APPROVAL OF A CONSTITUTION, A WHITE REFERENDUM, AND POSSIBLY AN ELECTION LEADING TO INSTALLATION OF A POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY WEAK GOVERNMENT, CONTINUATION OF THE WAR, AND EVENTUALLY A MILITARY SOLUTION LEAVING MILITARY LEADERS RATHER THAN THE PRESENT POLITICAL FIGURES IN CHARGE.

8. WE MAY, THEREFORE, HAVE TO CONSIDER MORE FORCEFUL STEPS IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS TO BRING THE PARTIES TOGETHER. ONE POSSIBILITY IS THAT WE ISSUE A FORMAL PUBLIC INVITATION FROM PRESIDENT CARTER AND PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN FOR AN ALL-PARTIES MEETING AT A SPECIFIC PLACE AND TIME A WEEK OR TWO BEFORE HAND. WE WOULD HAVE PRESENTED THE IDEA TO SMITH AHEAD OF TIME TO GET HIS COOPERATION -- WHICH IT WOULD DEPEND UPON. HE WOULD THEN ANNOUNCE HIS ACCEPTANCE AS WOULD NKOMO AND MUGABE. AT THAT POINT, I BELIEVE CHIRAU AND SITHOLE WOULD SIGN UP AND THE CHANCES ARE THAT MUZOREWA WOULD ALSO IN THE END. THE MEETING WOULD STILL

BE HELD IN PRIVATE AMONG PRINCIPALS AND DEPUTIES ONLY, AT A  
SECLUDED AND PROTECTED LOCATION.

9. IT MAY NOT BE NECESSARY TO GO THIS FAR TO FORCE MUZOREWA'S  
HAND. (IT WOULD CERTAINLY BE PREFERABLE TO HAVE THE-  
CONFERENCE WITHOUT PREVIOUS PUBLICITY IN ORDER TO AVOID  
PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS NARROWING THEIR BARGAINING  
RANGE.) THE SUGGESTION BY SMITH (OR GAYLORD) TO THE BISHOP THAT  
A PUBLIC INVITATION FOLLOWED BY HIS "NECESSARY" ACCEPTANCE MIGHT  
BE ENOUGH. WE WOULD ALSO HAVE TO GET NKOMO AND MUGABE'S  
ASSURANCES THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT BEFORE HAND.

10. THE PROBLEM, OF COURSE, IS THAT IF MUZOREWA MAINTAINED HIS  
REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE, WE WOULD HAVE TO BE WILLING TO GO AHEAD  
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WITHOUT HIM. I BELIEVE THERE IS ENOUGH INTERNATIONAL AND  
RHODESIAN SUPPORT FOR AN ALL-PARTIES MEETING THAT THE RISK IS AN  
ACCEPTABLE ONE. FURTHERMORE, HIS NON-PARTICIPATION WOULD NOT  
FREEZE HIM OUT OF ANY AGREEMENT WHICH ISSUED FROM THE MEETING.

11. THE PROBLEM OF LOCATION FOR A MEETING IS DIFFICULT. GRAHAM  
AND I ARE NOW CONVINCED WE WILL NOT GET WITHOLE OR MUZOREWA TO A  
MEETING IN ZAMBIA. I PERSONALLY BELIEVE THE BEST VENUE BY FAR  
IS THE UK. BUT THE BRITISH HAVE A PROBLEM ADMITTING SMITH AND  
ARE WARY OF A FAILURE CLOSE TO HOME. I WONDER WHETHER WE COULD  
APPEAL TO THEM AGAIN. IF NOT, WE WILL HAVE TO LOOK ELSEWHERE.  
THE POSSIBILITIES SEEM TO ME TO BE THE FOLLOWING:

A. ASCENCION - ADVANTAGE: BRITISH-OWNED FACILITIES ADEQUATE,  
CLOSER TO US AND UK, NOT TOO FAR FROM AFRICA, PRIVATE FROM  
PRESS. DISADVANTAGE: IT WAS THE TAKE OFF POINT FOR THE  
STANLEYVILLE RESCUE OPERATION IN 1965 - ONE OF THE MOST  
HUMILIATING EXERCISES FOR AFRICANS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES; NO  
PLACE FOR FRONT LINE.

B. AKROTIRI, CYPRUS - ADVANTAGE: SAME AS ABOVE.  
DISADVANTAGE: NKOMO HAS EXPRESSED HIS OBJECTIONS TO ITS  
"COLONIAL" CHARACTER. MUGABE PROBABLY WOULD TOO; NO PLACE FOR  
FRONT LINE. SWAZILAND - ADVANTAGE: PROBABLY POLITICALLY  
ACCEPTABLE TO ALL. DISADVANTAGE: DISTANCE, NO INTERNATIONAL  
AIRPORT, NO KNOWN ACCEPTABLE FACILITIES, DIFFICULT TO KEEP  
PRIVATE.

D. MAURITIUS - ADVANTAGES: PROBABLY POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO  
ALL. DISADVANTAGE: DISTANCE, DIFFICULTY OF KEEPING PRESS AWAY.

E. A KENYA GAME LODGE - ADVANTAGES: MORE CONVENIENT TO  
TRANSPORT, COULD BE KEP PRIVATE, ACCOMMODATIONS SATISFACTORY.

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DISADVANTAGE: MUGABE HAS EARLIER EXPRESSED STRONG OBJECTION  
TO A LOCATION IN KENYA.

F. CANARY ISLANDS - ADVANTAGES: CLOSER TO U.S., UK; ADEQUATE  
ACCOMMODATIONS AND AIR FACILITIES; PROBABLY POLITICALLY  
ACCEPTABLE. DISADVANTAGE: DISTANCE FROM AFRICA, DIFFICULTY  
KEEPING THE PRESS AWAY.

I SUGGEST THE DEPARTMENT LOOK SERIOUSLY INTO THOSE OF THE ABOVE  
ALTERNATIVES IT CONSIDERS BEST BY MAKING DETAILED AND SPECIFIC  
ENQUIRIES OF POSTS INVOLVED.

12. IN THE EVENT THAT THE PARTIES REFUSED TO GIVE US SUFFICIENT  
PRIOR ASSURANCE THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT SUCH AN INVITATION, OR THE  
MEETING WAS HELD AND FAILED, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD THEN CONSIDER  
PUTTING FORWARD OUR PROPOSAL IN AS COMPLETE FORM AS POSSIBLE IN A  
SIGNLE PACKAGE, AS WE DID ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1977. WE WOULD EXPLAIN  
THAT WE HAD MODIFIED IT DURING THE YEAR AS A RESULT OF  
EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE PARTIES AND THEIR OWN  
PROPOSALS (MARCH 3RD AGREEMENT). WE WOULD SAY WE WERE PREPARED TO  
CONTRIBUTE TO ITS IMPLEMENTATION BUT NOT FURTHER MODIFICATION.  
WE MIGHT THEN FIND THAT FRONT LINE AND SOUTH AFRICAN PRESSURE  
WOULD BE FORTHCOMING AND THAT SMITH MIGHT BE TEMPTED. CERTAINLY  
THERE WOULD BE PRESSURE TO ACCEPT FROM INSIDE RHODESIA. OUR  
OWN POSTURE WOULD BE BETTER THAN JUST LETTING AN INITIATIVE FIZZLE  
AWAY IN THE REFUSAL OF THE PARTIES TO MEET (OR THE FAILURE OF A  
CONFERENCE) AND THERE WOULD BE A FOCUS FOR FUTURE ACTION.

EDMONDSON

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